

The Patriot Ledger

By Treasurer Deborah Goldberg

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TREASURER DEBORAH GOLDBERG: Closing the gender wage gap



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Seventy years after we became the first state to mandate equal pay for comparable work, a significant wage gap persists. Today in Massachusetts, women earn just 82 cents on the dollar. African-American women – 61 cents. Latina women – 50 cents.

These numbers have real, damaging consequences on both our people and our economy.

Wage inequality is not just a woman's issue, it is a family issue and an economic issue that affects the health and well-being of our entire state. When women are not paid the wages they deserve – the wages they have earned – household income, consumer spending and economic growth suffers.

Pending legislation to address the wage gap, sponsored by state Sen. Pat Jehlen and state Rep. Jay Livingstone, offers solutions with concrete tangible actions. The bill clarifies the true meaning of like or comparable work, establishes new standards to protect pay transparency and requires employers to publish minimum salary levels when advertising job postings.

As critical as this bill is to closing the wage gap, legislation alone is not sufficient to eliminate it. Government has a role to play in regulating workforce standards and leading by example, but cannot fully address every problem in our society. That is precisely why engaging with and learning from the private sector is pivotal to our success.

Last week, through our Office of Economic Empowerment, we launched our first roundtable discussion with business leaders to hear directly from them about the policies and practices they are adopting to achieve wage equality. We heard directly from CEOs and Human Resource executives

about the importance of mentorship programs for young women, training sessions for managers and parental leave policies that level the playing field.

Earlier this year at the state pension fund, which owns stock in nearly 9,000 companies, we revised our proxy voting guidelines. Using our voice as a shareholder to influence corporate governance policies, the Pension Reserves Investment Management (PRIM) Board adopted a new statement of principle urging companies to lead on wage equality. We recommended both equal pay for comparable work and open access to salary information along with clear compensation principles.

As a former businesswoman, I learned firsthand that treating your workers fairly is not only the right thing to do but also the only way to survive in a competitive marketplace. When you treat employees with the dignity and respect they deserve it builds a more committed and productive workforce. It boosts talent retention and continuity. And it lowers the cost of staff turnover, new training and lost productivity.

That is why in the coming months our statewide Advisory Committee on Wage Equality will continue to engage directly with government agencies and the private sector by hosting additional roundtable discussions and developing a toolkit of best practices. We will also organize a statewide conference to share effective strategies and launch an equal pay website. This website will serve as a one stop shop for employers and employees.

Due to the diligence of business leaders, legislators and countless advocates, we are now at the moment of meaningful change that will create long-term sustainable economic growth within our state. Addressing the wage gap is not just a social issue. It is a true economic issue for our state and our nation.

Deborah Goldberg was elected treasurer of Massachusetts in 2014.

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